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For Immediate Release

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Sellers of Illegal Mexican Cheese That Caused Illness Settle Civil Complaint Filed by DA

San Diego District Attorney Bonnie M. Dumanis announced today that a settlement has been reached with the owners of Rodeo's Meat Markets for selling illegal Mexican cheese known as queso fresco. The case was part of a law enforcement response to a countywide salmonella outbreak in 2004.

Salvador and Noemi Linares, both of San Marcos, did not admit wrongdoing, but agreed to pay \$190,500 in penalties and investigation costs. The allegations involved seven Rodeo's Markets located in Oceanside, Vista, San Marcos, National City, El Cajon and two in San Diego. An investigation began in May 2004 after inspectors from the San Diego County Department of Environmental Health found cheese for sale at the Oceanside location that was from an unapproved source and made from milk that was not pasteurized.

"When a salmonella outbreak that spread across the county in 2004 was determined by the Health Department to have been caused by this popular soft cheese, we formed a task force," DA Dumanis said. "We worked together to respond immediately to reports of street vendors selling queso fresco and prosecuted them when appropriate."

The illegal cheese task force was made up of representatives from the San Diego County Department of Environmental Health, the California Department of Food & Agriculture, the San Diego City Attorney's Office and the San Diego County District Attorney's Office.

The agreement reached in San Diego Superior Court includes prohibiting the chain of Rodeo's Markets from buying the popular cheese from unapproved sources, making sure the stores commit no additional health code violations, eliminating unsanitary conditions and improving employee practices.

The company agreed to pay \$128,561 in penalties and \$61,939 in costs to the San Diego County Department of Environmental Health, District Attorney's Office and the California Department of Food & Agriculture.

To report an illegal cheese vendor, consumers can call (619) 338-2283. To report a case of food borne illness, call (619) 338-2356.

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